



START OF THE HORSE-SHOE TRAIL IN PENNA.
VALLEY FORGE TO APPALACHIAN TRAIL ON STONY MT.
121 MILES — THROUGH
CHESTER, BERKS, LANCASTER, LEBANON, DAUPHIN COUNTIES.

THIS MARKER ERECTED 1972
BY THE HORSE-SHOE TRAIL CLUB, INC. 1935
IN MEMORY OF HENRY N. WOOLMAN, FOUNDER.



OFFICIAL SYMBOL OF
THE BICENTENNIAL OF
THE UNITED STATES

GEORGE WASHINGTON HIKED HERE



by J. Stephen Conn

How does an inveterate backpacker celebrate his country's 200th birthday? One way would be to ignore the whole thing and retreat to the hills. A more patriotic idea would be to take a hike through history. It would be hard to find a footpath anywhere in America that traverses more historically significant country than does eastern Pennsylvania's Horse-Shoe Trail.

Affording opportunities for horseback riders as well as hikers, the Horse-Shoe Trail begins where our nation began—at Valley Forge, within suburban Philadelphia. Following high ridges through Chester, Berks, Lebanon, Lancaster, and Dauphin Counties, it ends in a junction with the Appalachian Trail at Rattling Run Gap, 12 miles north of Hershey. The entire 120-mile route is steeped in history dating back to the American Revolution and before.

During the darkest days of the American Revolution, General George Washington and his Continental Army of 11,000 men took an eight-day hike. It wasn't for fun or exercise.

In December, 1777, they left their position at Ft. Mifflin, in White-marl Valley, and marched to Valley Forge. This was the site chosen to be their winter quarters. Their path over the frozen ground was stained with blood from bare, raw feet, and strewn with the bodies of those who didn't make it.

Valley Forge was not much more than a campsite with a commanding view during that winter. It wouldn't be until mid-January before all of the troops were under shelter.

Two days before Christmas, Washington wrote to the Continental Congress pleading for supplies to aid his men:

"I can assure you it is much easier and less distressing to draw remon-strances in a comfortable room by a good fireside, than to occupy a cold bleak hill and sleep under snow without clothes and blankets. I feel super-abundantly for the naked, sick and distressed soldiers, and from my soul, pity those miseries which it is neither in my power to relieve or prevent."

Three thousand of those for whom Washington pleaded would be massacred by the white pall of winter, before spring came to drive it away.

Sir George Otto Trevelyan wrote, "The proud and mournful traditions of that winter survived, for many a long year, in every township and every state, and have taken a firm hold on the imagination of posterity. Nations, like the readers of fiction, love a sad story which ends well; and the name of Valley Forge will never cease to be

associated with the memory of suffering quietly and steadfastly borne, but not endured in vain."

Today, Valley Forge State Park is a 2,300-acre area owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It contains 20 miles of improved highways and eight miles of paths. A day or two could be well spent here, ruminating while hiking over ground once walked by Washington, Baron Frederick Von Steuben, General Anthony Wayne, Alexander Hamilton, Lafayette, and many others.

The Horse-Shoe Trail starts near Washington's headquarters on the western edge of the park, at the junction of Highways 23 and 252. Washington slept here for six months. Built in 1760, the headquarters building is still 90 percent intact.

From Washington's headquarters, the trail crosses Valley Creek on a stone bridge and gradually begins to ascend Mt. Misery. For over two centuries, legend has told of a small exploring party encamped nearby on the banks of the Schuylkill River. Two members lost their way in the hills. They spent a distraught night stumbling and groping through the dark forest. Just as dawn was breaking, the weary scouts ascended a hill, and from the top discovered with joy the camp of their party. That hill they called Mt. Joy. The hill on which they had spent the past wretched night, they called Mt. Misery. One of the party is believed to have been William Penn. Remember him when you climb Mt. Misery.

You are just starting your hike, and there is history in every mile. There is also solitude.

Over five million people live within an hour's drive of the Horse-Shoe Trail. In the nine days that it took to hike from end-to-end, I met only three of those five million people on the trail. Ironically, I met all three of these in the St. Anthony's Wilderness Area, the most remote part of the trail—near the western terminus.

Meeting only three people in nine days is an experience hard to come by on most better known trails. Note the difference in this journal excerpt, written the day I passed the western terminus of the Horse-Shoe Trail while backpacking the Appalachian Trail.

"Seventeen people, including eight boy scouts, are camping here tonight at the new and unique Rausch Gap Shelter. Eight are sleeping in the lean-to; eight are in tents; and I am under a motherly Hemlock tree."

The Horse-Shoe Trail is surprisingly secluded for such a densely populated area. It follows old logging roads, fire roads, cowpaths, Indian trails, and an

occasional country road. But even blacktop can make for a pleasant hiking route through some of America's richest and most picturesque farm lands. On the average road stretch I saw no more than three or four cars per hour. That's not exactly wilderness, but it isn't an expressway either. One road adjoining the trail is an old Indian dirt road which parallels the old Conestoga Road. The Conestoga was the first connecting highway between Philadelphia and Lancaster and one of America's first turnpikes. Completed in 1794, the Conestoga Road got its name from the 3,500-pound "land frigates," or covered wagons, which used it.

Among the historic sites you will pass are the ruins of the Warwick Furnace and Iron Foundry. Built in 1737, this typical colonial "iron plantation" manufactured much of the cannon and shot that armed America in her fight for freedom. The early Franklin stoves were also cast here.

The trail skirts the Hopewell Village National Historic Site, a restored iron furnace now operated by the National Park Service. Hopewell Village was founded by Mark Bird in 1770, just in time to supply the Revolutionary armies. The furnace operated for over a century, employing as many as 65 people. These charcoal-burning furnaces consumed about one acre of trees a day for fuel. More modern competition caused Hopewell Furnace to close in 1883. The trees have since regained the surrounding hills which now comprise the 6,000-acre French Creek State Park.

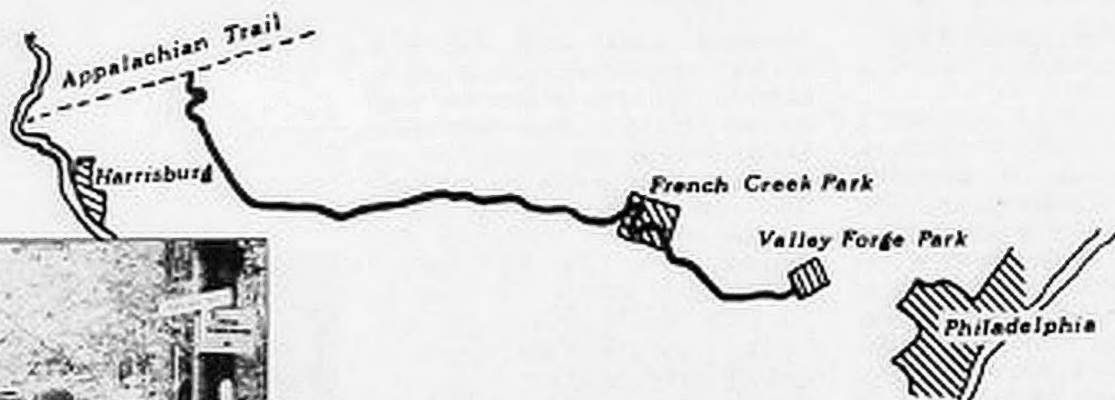
Eight miles of the Horse-Shoe wind through French Creek State Park, originally developed by the federal government, in 1934, as a National Park Service Recreation Area. Thirty-five miles of other trails are maintained in the park by the American Neotom Society of Birdsboro, PA.

Further west along the Horse-Shoe Trail, you will pass near the site of the Elizabeth Furnace, built in 1763 for the manufacture of glass. Robert Coleman, who owned this furnace during the Revolution, "bought" 80 captured Hessians from the Continental Congress. He paid 32 to 45 shillings each for the men and used them to cast large quantities of supplies for the American army. A number of the Hessians settled in the area, and some of their descendants still live in the neighborhood.

Through this area you just might get a feeling that old history is still alive—literally. The central part of the Horse-Shoe Trail borders the northern fringes of the famed Amish lands of Lancaster



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Country. Here the devout Amish still shun the "worldly" conveniences of automobiles, electricity, etc., and live as their ancestors did when America was young. The horses and buggies you see are not for show; they are for real.

Continuing westward, the trail passes the site of Manda Fort, a link in the chain of defense works erected during the Pontiac War. It was built under an appointment given to Col. Benjamin Franklin in 1756. Now, only a few stones are left of the fort.

Keep going, and you will pass living reminders of America's most recent war. Here the Indian Gap Military Reservation served as temporary asylum for thousands of Vietnamese refugees.

The trail finds its western terminus in the St. Anthony's Wilderness, an area unbroken by human habitation for 14 miles. This 36,000-acre area is on land now owned by the Pennsylvania State Game Commission. Here are the silent remains of a ghost town, Rausch Gap Village, a coal mining village that flourished about 1850. The name "St. Anthony's Wilderness" dates back to a map made in 1770 by W. Scull for Thomas and Richard Penn.

But St. Anthony's Wilderness may not be a wilderness forever. Right now, this last unspoiled wild area in Southeastern Pennsylvania is embroiled in controversy. Pennsylvania Power and Light Company and the Metropolitan Edison Company have made a joint proposal to construct a hydroelectric pumped storage plant in Stony Creek Valley, which is the heart of St. Anthony's Wilderness. A citizen's group, the Stony Creek Valley Coalition, is fighting against old demon "Progress." If the "demon" wins, much of the Horse-Shoe Trail will be under water. Better hurry if you want to hike through Stony Valley without a snorkel.

I happen to live within a few miles of the Horse-Shoe and have been privileged to hike portions of it in every season. Each season has its special sensory joys. To me, Spring is best for hearing; birds and brooks, bumblebees

and bullfrogs are in their best harmony. Summer is best for smelling and tasting when berries and clouds burst ripe under the hot afternoon sun. Fall is best for seeing, an incredibly colorful display. But Winter is for solitude.

One January day, when the high temperature was 20 degrees, and seven inches of week-old snow were on the ground, I broke 14 miles of fresh trail without seeing a human footprint other than at road crossings. Wildlife tracks were everywhere.

Wildlife which I have sighted on the trail include whitetail deer, turkey, ruffed grouse, and a large variety of other small game and birds. I once encountered a three-foot copperhead snake in the Stony Creek Valley, but the most dangerous animals I met on the trail were those that bark.

The Horse-Shoe Trail began in 1935 as an idea in the mind of Henry N. Woolman, founder and first president of the Horse-Shoe Trail Club, Inc., a non-profit corporation. The trail is maintained exclusively by voluntary efforts. It exists largely through the generosity of private land owners who allow the trail to cross their property. Needless to say, those using the trail should give due respect and care to both private and public lands crossed by the trail. Motor vehicles, large and small, are strictly prohibited.

The best source of additional information is "Guide to the Horse-Shoe Trail in Pennsylvania," containing trail description and maps, available for \$2.00 postpaid from Trails Chairman Marlin Kemmerer, 2511 S. Lloyd St., Philadelphia, PA 19142. Those who are interested may join the Horse-Shoe Trail Club by sending \$3 (annual dues) to Treasurer Cornelia Polotnik, Box 62, Wilmington, DE 19899. Membership dues include a subscription to *The Blaze*, a newsletter about the trail. For those who live nearby, the club schedules regular hikes on the third Sunday of each month. Also, the club awards a certificate to those who complete the entire trail. ■



A black, rectangular trail register box is attached to the trunk of a large tree in a forest. The box has the words "HORSE-SHOE TRAIL REGISTER" printed in yellow, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The tree trunk is thick and has a deeply textured, cracked bark. The background shows a dense forest with many thin tree trunks and green foliage. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating dappled light on the ground. A large, flat rock is visible at the base of the tree where the register is attached.

**HORSE-
SHOE
TRAIL
REGISTER**



Photos courtesy of the Horse-Shoe Trail Facebook have been added to the upload.

END OF THE HORSE-SHOE TRAIL
121 MILES FROM ITS ORIGIN AT VALLEY FORGE
THIS MARKER ERECTED 1974 IN MEMORY OF

CYRUS C. STURGIS, JR.

1914 — 1971

LINGUIST-TRANSLATOR-EDITOR
TRAIL COMPANION PAR EXCELLENCE